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International Students' Career Services (ISCS): Globalizing your University's Career Services*

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This paper will chronicle the development of the International Students' Career Services (ISCS) at the University of Missouri – Columbia (MU), an office devoted exclusively to the unique career needs of international students. This process developed over the last three years, with the help and support of numerous faculty, university leaders, and the international students that we serve.

Background

Conceptual Organization: Caffarella's Model

Clearly describing and explaining such a long and complicated process posed challenges in the telling; program planning and development is a process that does not lend itself well to a linear format. To facilitate our description, this paper's structure is based on Rosemary Caffarella's Interactive Model of Program Planning (2002). This model recognizes the non-linear design of program development, as well the dynamic and ever-changing process of bringing a new program to life. It is our intent to use this model for organizational purposes, for a more in-depth explanation, see Caffarella (2002).

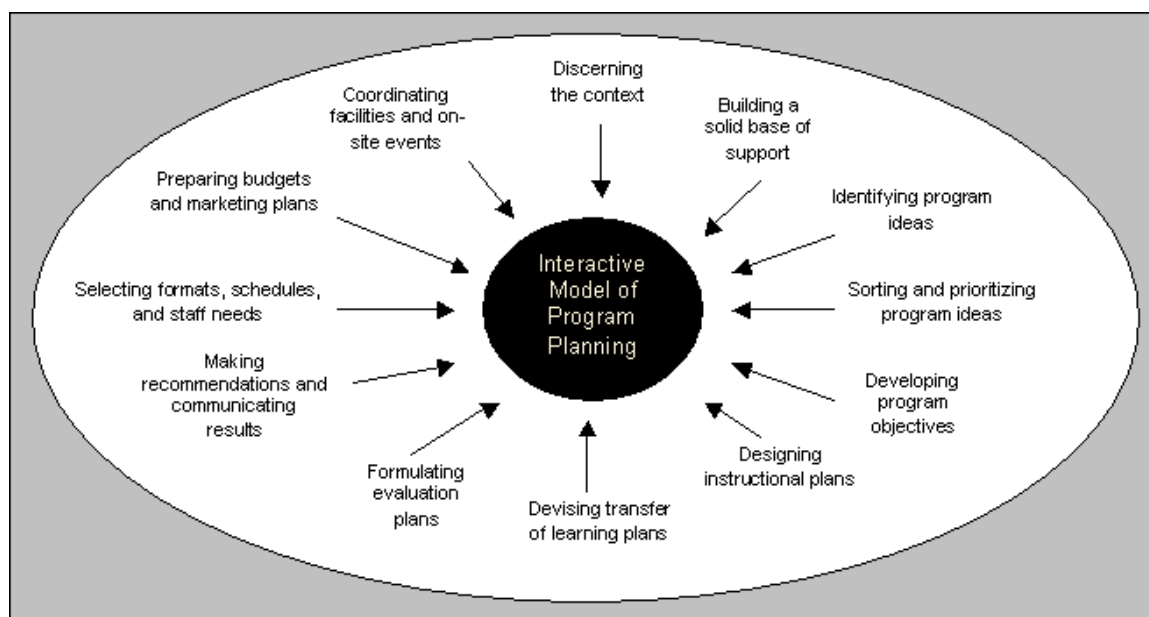


Figure 1: Caffarella's Interactive Model of Program Planning

ISCS Organization

There are also a few important notes concerning ISCS's organizational context. The University of Missouri-Columbia offers decentralized career services through ten career offices around the Columbia campus. ISCS is formally a part of the MU Career Center, which is housed in a student services building and charged with serving primarily Arts & Sciences and undecided students (though ISCS serves the entire international student population). The MU Career Center is structured on the paraprofessional staffing model, using both undergraduate and graduate students as primary client contact staff.

Funding and oversight for ISCS is collaborative in nature. The office is supervised by both the MU Career Center and the Center for Multicultural Research, Training, and Development (which is a part of the Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology). The former is responsible primarily for administrative oversight, while the latter works to train and supervise the counseling

psychology graduate students. The ISCS Coordinator, Sharon Lee, handles direct supervision and administration.

While much of our structure and services will be discussed in this paper, to contextualize the development of ISCS, a few of the significant events are included in this table:

<i>Major ISCS Events</i>	
Sept 2001—Feb 2002	An earlier, volunteer version of ISCS in the MU Career Center
Fall 2003	A new proposal to integrate training with ISCS develops and campus conditions are gauged to be favorable
Fall 2004	Needs assessments, support building, and a business proposal is developed
January 2005	Initial funding for ISCS secured; first services are offered
May 2005	Funding increased to include a full-time coordinator; Sharon Lee hired
Academic year 2005/6	Services expanded, office location change in partnership with MU Career Center increases space
June 2006	Third year funding secured

Table 1: ISCS Events

Discerning the context

Types of International Students

In order to be able to provide suitable services to international students, ISCS needed to develop an understanding of their different career needs. In general, there are three types of international students: a) U.S. focused, b) return focused, c) undecided. Specifically, those international students who plan to stay in the U.S. are in greater need of learning American job search skills, while those who plan to return to their home countries may need more resources in networking and seeking jobs in their home countries. In addition, the group of international students who consider themselves still undecided in their future career locale and direction may need more support and information in looking at various internal (interest) and external (opportunities in different countries) aspects of their career

development to assist them in making an informed decision. Assessment of their stages and support in career exploration from our career staff become very important.

International Students' Career Issues

From literature and the personal work experiences with international students, there are common characteristics of international students that arise. First of all, international students demonstrate a lot of strengths that may not be readily recognized both by themselves and service professionals. These strengths include strong motivation in learning and working, global perspectives and experiences, adaptability and resourcefulness, multi-lingual competence, and international connections. It is critical for career service professionals to be aware of students' strengths and use them to increase career self-efficacy, which has shown to be significantly related to positive outcomes in job searching (Saks & Ashforth, 1999; Kanfer & Hulin, 1985). There is also a need to recognize the stressors that international students are faced with. They include challenges in transitioning to the U.S., academic pressures due to different education systems, financial strains, job search pressures, pressures from family to be successful, and limited social supports.

Moreover, international students may be faced with unique challenges in the job search process. They may encounter different communication styles and ways of social interaction. The expectation of the presentation of self could be different from their culture, such as the American importance of self-promotion in the job interview. From personal observation, international students from non-English speaking countries may develop low language self-efficacy, which could have a great impact on their general confidence level and presentation of self to employers. International students also have limited networks because of their temporary legal status in the U.S. Money and time for processing H1B

visas are one of the biggest barriers in international students' job seeking, besides employers' prejudice or discrimination towards foreigners.

Building Solid Base of Support, Sorting & Prioritizing Program Ideas

Bringing Focus to ISCS

One of the first things any organization must do is to develop a mission statement of rationale and potential services. By doing so, an organization is able to develop a clear central goal to follow. Developing a clear goal was a key component when marketing services to the target audience, but even more so when marketing the program to ISCS administrators and key stakeholders and looking for support. Specifically, it allows the organization flexibility to change to the stakeholders need, but not lose the larger, central goal of the organization.

This was a key component for ISCS in identifying stakeholders who would support a unique career program for international students, meetings with key stakeholders that would believe in our overall goals, and asking for financial support. When identifying financial stakeholders, the hierarchy in administrative level was followed, starting from the bottom up. It was found that the more support received from other service providers, the easier it was to discuss the program and gain support from the higher administrators who managed those service providers. This procedure also allowed us to become more knowledgeable of needs for other service providers so that we could discuss collaborative programs for increased stakeholder buy-in. And again, having a central mission allowed us to be flexible in promoting collaborative programs without losing our central goals.

Identifying Program Ideas, Sorting & Prioritizing Program Ideas

How We Chose Our Services

An important part of any student service organization is providing programming that satisfies the needs of the target audience, in this case University of Missouri international students. The first step that was taken was conducting a literature review of the existing international issues found in major journals. This enabled us to gain broad knowledge regarding international students' career needs, perceived career barriers, and help seeking attitudes.

Second, we conducted an on-campus need assessment in the form of two focus groups to better understand our own university international career needs. This is especially important as literature will help in the facilitation of focus groups, but it may not address the needs of the specific dynamics and make up of the diverse internationals on a unique campus. This aided ISCS in identifying potential services or concerns that needed to be addressed, as well as the appropriate format. For instance, through the focus group ISCS found that pre-existing career services did not meet the needs of the international students on campus, as many of the existing service providers did not have the resources or specific knowledge regarding international concerns. Also, since our campus includes predominantly international graduate students, career exploration was not a topic highly valued by this population, therefore resources would be better focused on concrete job searching skills. Lastly, it was found that there was a need for service providers with culturally sensitive counseling training, as many emotional and psychological issues tied to their current career concerns, which may not be addressed in other environments due to cultural stigma.

After obtaining this information, staff members identified and visited pre-existing career services offering career programming for internationals at other universities. These visits facilitated the

conceptualization of the ISCS model, as well as an opportunity to learn trends, experiences, and innovative ideas from other universities.

Another method in obtaining information on choosing services was through evaluative data collected over the semesters during workshops. In these evaluations qualitative information on what type of services or topics still needed by the international students utilizing our program were obtained and analyzed.

Lastly, collaboration with other campus offices was provided, which helped reduce costs as well as raise awareness and support for ISCS. Some examples of these collaborative efforts have been: international etiquette dinner - a dinner for students to learn how to interact professionally during global business meals, and workshops tailored for Korean undergraduates looking to work in a global environment for the English Proficiency Internship program from MU's Asian Affairs Center.

ISCS Services

ISCS provides two main types of services to MU international students: group services and individual services. Group services include workshops, International Alumni Panel, Job Search Connection, International Etiquette Dinner, internet services, library resources, requested outreach and training, and work abroad website and resources. Particularly, workshops attract the most international students. ISCS also conducts 5 to 7 workshops each semester on career related topics that are relevant to international students' unique situation, such as finding an on-campus job, working with American advisors and academic writing, introducing and tips to succeed at U.S. job fairs, writing an American-style resume, curriculum vita, and cover letters, and basic American-style interviewing skills. There is

an average attendance of 22 people per workshop.

Additionally, ISCS would invite several international alumni who successfully secured jobs in the U.S. to be our panelists at the International Alumni Panel. These panelists share their experiences with MU international students each semester. Usually, the Alumni Panel is non-academic orientated in fall and academic oriented in spring, which are consistent with the trends of recruiting in the U.S. job market.

In addition to group services, ISCS also provides various kinds of individual services, such as individual consultation on a walk-in basis, short-term career counseling, and mock interviews. Looking into future and developing more quality programming, ISCS hopes to develop international mentoring programs, credit class to fulfill requirement of CPT, and international career fair, as well as expand our audience to include American students who wish to work abroad.

Evaluations & Feedback

Developing Evaluations

For ISCS, evaluations were a critical component since the program first began to take shape, far before the first day of services. Much of ISCS's funding successes have been directly attributable to our focus of measuring our effectiveness in meeting the international student population's needs. Besides our ability to check our progress and ensure that we are providing needed services though, our ability to communicate that effectiveness was essential to building and maintaining stakeholder and financial support.

The form used has evolved over time, but our main goal has always been to collect information on

demographics, evaluations of services, and interest in future services. Efforts have been made to keep evaluative questions similar to allow for trend data. Detailed reporting on these measures has allowed us to prove both campus need for this service and our effective use of resources.

Making Recommendation & Community Results

Communicating Results

In addition to collecting the data, when reporting ISCS program activities, maintaining relationships with key stakeholders and supporters is the central aim. Relationships are maintained through delivery of meeting minutes, regular personal update meetings, invitations to open houses, partnering with other stakeholder offices to deliver services, participating in international student events, as well as semester and annual reports. For printed reports, graphic reporting methods are used, such as a newsletter format, rather than primarily text delivery methods [See Figure 2].



Figure 2: ISCS Semester Report

Selecting Formats, Schedules, & Staff Needs

ISCS staff

ISCS recognizes the importance of competent service providers for the diverse international student population. Thus, ISCS staff is required to have counseling experience and knowledge of career issues, which allows them to be sensitive to not only international students' career needs but also their emotional reactions in the process. As international students are reported to be less likely to use university counseling services (Leong & Sedlacek, 1989; Yang et al, 2002; Biko & Furry, 1999), staff's counseling background becomes more important in working with this population. ISCS staff

receives training through a required multicultural practicum for their assistantship and in-service training. In addition, their supervision focuses on reflection and improvement of culturally sensitive services through case consultation. The diversity among current ISCS staff reflects diverse population and gives the ISCS face validity. They all either have international status or prior international experiences. Also, ISCS staff is very active in the international community at the University, which allows personal connection with international leaders and opportunities to promote ISCS' services.

Preparing Budgets & Marketing Plans

Marketing

Marketing can be an essential part of any service providers' organization. Successful marketing can be a deal breaker for many start-up organizations. For international students, it was not only about advertising ISCS services but also developing a marketing strategy based on face validity and trust in the organization. Face validity and trust were a central theme in the ISCS focus group comments. Many focus group members discussed how many internationals do not trust career service due to what they or their peers have experienced in the past, or due to stigmas. Therefore one way to overcome this barrier is to become involved within the international community. ISCS has reached out and partnered in positive collaboration with other trusted service providers on campus, which has assisted the building of a clientele exponentially. These trusted service providers not only are able to refer students to our fledgling service, but also give ISCS face validity as they trust in our service to assist their students. Also, ISCS participates in as many international community events. It gives international students faces and personalities to associate with our services. Lastly, it is highly encouraged within ISCS staff to be involved in international organizations, which again helps the

organization build a positive reputation of active involvement and concern for this population. Because of all this, ISCS has been very successful in attracting students to utilize our services.

From past experiences, it was realized that the best channel to reach international students at the MU campus is through e-mail and word of mouth through relationships built over the history of the program. This has been one of the most effective means of getting repeated and new contacts with students as friends or trusted contacts have the largest influences on utilization of the service.

One aspect of marketing that differs greatly from traditional marketing to U.S. citizens with native English skills is the importance of language. ISCS staff members have found that direct and intentional choice of words are used to avoid misinterpretations or confusion. One example was of use of the typical American slang such as “101”, as in “Resumes 101”. For many of the international students, “101” may be a foreign phrase and therefore the introductory meaning of the workshop will be lost. Another prime example is the use of “consultation” versus “counseling”. Many international cultures have stigmas about counseling, therefore the use of consultation which is a more neutral term alleviates some of the negative barriers and preconceptions of the services.

Lessons We’ve Learned

There are a wealth of lessons that we have learned throughout the process and development of International Student Career Services. We hope that, in sharing them with other professionals serving international student populations, it might allow effective and targeted services, and minimize some frustrating mistakes. Several important lessons include:

- Language is important. When helping internationals assess their English skills and use straight forward language, avoid colloquialism, and speak slower (not louder) for those whose English

skill level is lower.

- Build personal relationships with international student groups to increase utilization and build trust and face validity.
- Be active in your promotion of services to international students in order to encourage them to come into your services.
- Be careful with workshop timing as since this is a large diverse population there may be many major holidays that you do not want your workshops to overlap with.
- Use more than one channel of marketing, collaborate with others, build relationships, send out e-mails, and use word of mouth advertising to your advantage.
- Ensure that you don't over commit to other's expectations. While collaborating with others is easy to over commit yourself as you try to flex your program to fit the requirements or needs, but always stay true to your central mission.

Top 10 Things You Can Do Now to Internationalize Your Career Services

Finally, if there is one thing that can be taken away from this article, we hope that it can be the fact that reaching out to international students is possible, and does not have to involve building an entire new program to serve them. Using the information and lessons learned in the formation of International Students's Career Services, there are innovative and even easy ways to include international students in career programming, no matter the educational setting. Here are a few ways that you can create effective, targeted services for international students at your career center:

- Find out more about your college/university's international population and their unique needs.
- Develop relationships with international student service providers such as your college/university's International Center or student organizations.
- Participate or assist in international events on campus, to raise your face value with the international community.
- Read up on international career literature to better understand overall career needs.
- Educate yourself and staff on international and multicultural issues/competencies.
- Incorporate pointers into your existing presentations to address international student issues.
- Gather more resources (both print and internet) aimed specifically for international students and translate a few important handouts into the top foreign languages.
- Offer one or two workshops specifically designed for international students.
- Start an international student advisory committee to help you globalize your career services.
- Employ or provide an internship opportunity to an international student or a domestic student who has spent time overseas.

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